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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. ELLMERS).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
September 22, 2011.

I hereby appoint the Honorable RENEE L. ELLMERS to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

JOHN A. BOEHNER,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 5, 2011, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to 1 hour and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes each, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

THE MUFFIN MAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE of Texas. Madam Speaker, do you know the muffin man, the muffin man, the muffin man? Yes, I know the muffin man, but he doesn't live on Drury Lane. He lives at the Department of Justice on Justice Lane and is growing rich on selling \$16 muffins at Justice Lane.

The Department of Justice's inspector general states that at only 10 conferences the Department of Justice spent almost \$500,000 on refreshments.

That's \$50,000 per conference for just refreshments. And that includes \$4,200 for 250 muffins.

Madam Speaker, how come these critters cost \$16 apiece? These are some high-dollar muffins that the Department of Justice is buying for its refreshments at conferences. Where do you even find a muffin that costs \$16? I've never seen one. Maybe they're shipped in from a special bakery in France with some secret ingredient. My favorite bakery, RAO's in Beaumont, Texas, tells me these things should be about \$2 apiece.

So why is the Justice Department with all those fancy lawyers letting the muffin man get away with this price gouging? Because the government doesn't care. It lives high on the hog with taxpayers' money.

So, Madam Speaker, do you know the muffin man, the muffin man? I know the muffin man, and the government should quit spending somebody else's money to keep the muffin man rolling in the dough.

And that's just the way it is.

AMERICA'S INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICIT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

As Washington appears to be trapped in partisan gridlock, sliding to budget paralysis and the potential of another government shutdown looming, there is one particular area that doesn't get the attention it merits, even as it is the key to our economic recovery. This is our serious and ever-growing infrastructure deficit. America's roads, bridges, water systems, transit, aviation ports all are in serious need of repair.

The American Society of Civil Engineers has, over the years, given grades

every 5 years to the state of infrastructure in the United States. Sadly, the latest survey showed that we are still getting a failing grade, and the gap necessary to bring these resources up to standard is growing larger, over \$2.3 trillion for 5 years to make it in a reasonable state of repair.

For example, we lose 6 billion gallons of water every day through leaks in aging pipes and sewer mains throughout the country. This is enough water to fill 9,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools. If you laid them end to end, you could swim from Washington, D.C., to Pittsburgh in the amount that is leaked every single day.

But it doesn't end there. In terms of the sad state of rail, deteriorating bridges, here is an opportunity for us to step forward dealing with a serious challenge that threatens America's productivity, threatens America's environmental and physical health, and puts hundreds of thousands of Americans to work at family wage jobs virtually overnight.

Madam Speaker, in times past, investment in infrastructure has been something that has captured the vision for the United States; but more than that, it has been part of how we have repaired some of our problems fiscally.

Remember in 1982, Ronald Reagan approved, as part of his budget stabilization program, a 5-cent a gallon increase in a user fee for gasoline that helped put the budget in balance and be able to finance needed infrastructure.

In 1993, as part of the Clinton program that led to the first balanced budgets that we had seen in decades, every year the deficit declined until the last 3 years he was in office, three successive years of increasing budget surplus, while we had an unprecedented increase in jobs, they included a modest gas tax increase.

There are a whole host of areas for user fees. I have bipartisan legislation for a water trust fund that would deal

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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with the problem I mentioned a moment ago. We have the superfund tax on the petrochemical industry to pay for the damage to the environment that they created that expired in 1995 and has not been renewed but we still have the superfunds to clean up, pushing that burden on State and local governments and on businesses that are required to spend money that wasn't their fault, giving the petrochemical industry a pass.

There's an opportunity, Madam Speaker, as the supercommittee is meeting, for Congress to step up in a bipartisan way to have resources to help rebuild and renew America. We're falling behind the Chinese. We're falling behind the Indians, the Brazilians, and the European Union, even while unemployment in the building trades is 20 percent or more from coast to coast.

There's an opportunity here for us to be able to stabilize the budget, deal with the infrastructure deficit, put hundreds of thousands of Americans to work virtually overnight, and maybe, just maybe, work together to heal the frayed political process here in Washington, D.C.

FUND FEMA NOT AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You know, Madam Speaker, it is so ironic that the American people are hurting in many, many ways, including those in my district from Hurricane Irene which did damage all of the way up to Vermont, the fires in Texas, and tornadoes, and yet we can't come together as two different parties to find agreement to increase the funding for FEMA so they can help victims of these disasters, and yet we can find \$10 billion a month to send to a corrupt leader in Afghanistan so that he can wear his robes and his caps and American kids can die and lose their legs and arms.

I do not understand why this Congress and the President of the United States do not understand that it's time to bring our troops home.

□ 1010

The American people are hurting in many, many ways, and the folly of the last day here in Washington where we cannot come together to increase the funding for FEMA is absolutely unacceptable—unacceptable—to the people of this country.

I was listening to C-SPAN coming in today, and it was just really somewhat ironic that the people are so angry with Congress, both parties actually, and cannot figure out why we are not doing what's necessary to fix the economy and create jobs to fix the infrastructure that my friend from Oregon just talked about. Oh, yes, but we can still find \$10 billion a month for Mr.

Karzai. Let's fix his roads in Afghanistan. Let's train his people to be troops and policemen.

Madam Speaker, that brings me to this poster I brought down to the floor today. Two little girls, Stephanie and Eden, their daddy, Sergeant Kevin Balduf, a United States marine stationed in Camp Lejeune, which is in my district, and Colonel Palmer, stationed at Cherry Point Marine Air Station, which is in my district, were sent to Afghanistan to train Afghans to be policemen.

One night, they were having dinner, the trainees, the colonel, and the sergeant, and one trainee pulled out a pistol and killed both of them. What is ironic is the day before Sergeant Balduf and Colonel Palmer were killed, Sergeant Balduf emailed his wife, Amy, and said: I don't trust them. I don't trust them. I don't trust any of them.

So these two little girls are standing at their daddy's funeral at Arlington. And you can see in their faces, Madam Speaker, a look of pain and a look of misunderstanding of what has happened. They don't understand what has happened.

So, Madam Speaker, I hope we in Congress will find the will to encourage President Obama to bring our troops home, because Secretary Gates has already said and been recorded that we will be there until 2015. How many young Americans have to die in the next 4 years to prop up a corrupt government? It makes no sense.

I hope the American people will rally behind those of us in both parties who want to bring our troops home, and let's get them home before 2015.

Madam Speaker, I close this way, the way I always do: God, please bless our men and women in uniform; God, please bless the families of our men and women in uniform; God, in Your loving arms hold the families who have given a child dying for freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq; God, please bless the House and Senate that we will do what is right in God's eyes for God's people; and I will ask God to give wisdom, strength, and courage to President Obama that he will do what is right in the eyes of God for God's people. And three times I will say, God, please, God, please, God, please continue to bless America.

HOUSING FORECLOSURES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT) for 5 minutes.

Mr. McDERMOTT. Madam Speaker, I'm taking the floor today to talk about foreclosures.

The problem of housing foreclosures in this country continues to be one of the central reasons our economy is not moving forward. While a lot of this economic wreckage is avoidable, this Congress continues to fiddle while the American housing market burns. Families across this country are being

tossed out in the street, and many of them don't need to be—and we can help them. We can help fix the housing market so that millions of American families can stay in their homes and others can have a smooth transition into renting. We could help, but this Congress is doing nothing.

Millions of homeowners are suffering through the worst recession in 100 years, and the Republican majority is not doing one single thing to help them. Just look at this map next to me. This is a snapshot of foreclosures across this country. The dark red areas are where the worst places are, but you see it covers everybody in the country.

Now, there isn't a district that isn't affected by this crisis. The housing market doesn't care about your politics. Three years after the Wall Street meltdown, millions of Americans are still facing foreclosure. One in four homeowners in this country is underwater, and home prices continue to drop.

While the housing market continues to steadily destruct and millions of Americans are needlessly pushed into poverty, this Congress isn't doing anything to stop it. Instead of fixing the economy, today we're going to debate a bill—a Republican bill—that attacks public health and children. The Republican priority is not foreclosures. It is to make sure that every American is breathing more mercury and toxins.

When the Democrats were in charge, it was different. We thought you should be able to write down mortgage principal in bankruptcy and modify mortgages more easily and get lenders to the bargaining table to avoid foreclosure. But the last Congress, Republican Senators stopped all that. And in this Congress, the Republicans in the House want to make sure we don't do anything. Instead, they cut programs for foreclosures and cut affordable housing. Instead of taking actions, Republicans say the market will fix it. In the market we trust. Not in God we trust, but in the market we trust that everything will be better.

But we're losing. We're long past a healthy correction. The damage being done is completely unavoidable. Make no mistake, Republican economic philosophy is pushing millions of Americans into the street, middle class Americans.

It's important to remember it was the banks that caused this crisis. Well, we bailed out the banks, and how did they thank the American people for the bailout? The banks went into foreclosure overdrive. They robo-signed foreclosures and filed fraudulent documents as fast as they could.

FDR once said, "take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly, and try another. But by all means, try something." And we can act. By just reducing the principal on all underwater homes to fair market value, \$71 billion would be injected into the economy. Every homeowner would save about \$6,500 a year in payments, and millions of new jobs would be created.